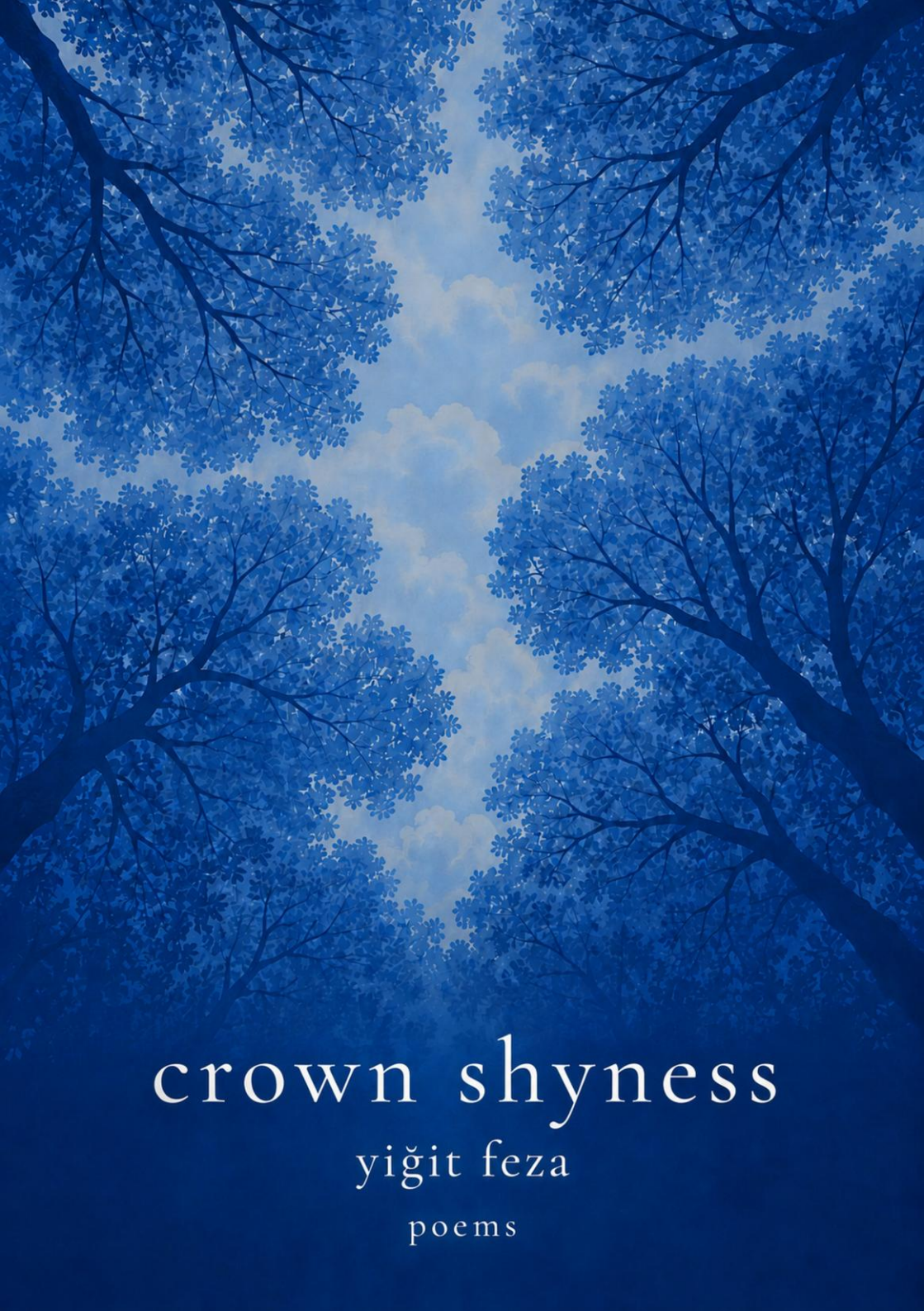
crown shyness
yiğit feza
poems

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PREFACE

Not being able to touch is not only failing to reach another person. It is failing to reach yourself, the time that has passed, the world. Knowing that a season has ended and still not being able to hold it. Putting off the saying of one sentence for years.

These poems circled that emptiness. Not one of them could fill it; perhaps it was never meant to be filled.

Fezaest

CROWN SHYNESS

Like two old suitcases forgotten in the corner of a room, we carried the emptiness inside each other. I did not understand you, nor you me. We failed to understand each other perfectly, and by disregarding one another we built a magnificent alliance. Between us, that silent crown shyness. The distance grows like two separate abysses in a single body; we cannot come one breath closer, nor can we break away altogether.

Perhaps this is a soul afraid of waking, trying to console its own nothingness inside somebody else's dream. Or simply a contradiction attempting to solve itself... Whenever I reach down into my own depth I am shaken at the roots; the sound turns back and strikes against my being. Loving yourself is harder than loving another, because a person can flee the other but is sentenced to himself. This is the captivity of unbroken exposure to my own flaws; and with the love that is rarely born of that captivity, I keep my distance from myself.

Now neither is this inner border crossed, nor is that magnificent alliance broken. We only carry it above our heads, this proud crown shyness, in the

very middle of that noble defeat where, fleeing ourselves, we are caught by ourselves again…

THRESHOLD

I choose to come to you with darkness.
Because in darkness no light is turned
away.

I choose to draw you through the void.
Because you are the only thing that turns
in this void.

I choose to keep you waiting in my orbit.
Because distance keeps me from being
undone.

I choose to touch you with the crease
between us.
Because that crease is gentler than my
weight.

I choose to hold you at my threshold,
where time has frozen.
Because at my threshold you have no
ending.

LIMESCALE

When the ticking of the watch knocks against the wrist you notice there is no surface left there to meet the rhythm, because in long silences the skin hardens like a layer of lime collapsing inward. The years pass, and that wide plain running from the spine to the nape covers itself in its own dust like the stairwell of a cellar no wind reaches; this is not a lack, nor is it pain, but the slow erasure of the spiral lines on the fingertips, the small bones of the hand locking together into a single mass. The skin sheds its hair like an old carpet nobody walks on, and the capillaries stop rising to the surface and withdraw to the centre, into the cold and sheltered marrow of the bone. Nobody did this to me; it was done by nobody doing anything.

Then suddenly, on an afternoon no one saw coming, while handing over a glass of tea or standing in a doorway, the edge of a stranger's hand grazes the forgotten hollow just above the wrist bone. The body reads the contact not as tenderness but as that predatory flora of the tissue, the one fed on quicklime; the foreign warmth shakes the whole system like an icy splinter driven in beneath the nails. The nerve endings wake from their sleep, and not knowing what to do they raise the hair the wrong way;

the pores shut in panic and the muscles try to fend off that soft touch as though it were a blow.

Memory was never kept in the fingerprint — you understand this while the cells clench with a clotted fear; it is not the skin that forgets but that mute armour which turned to stone in order to protect. You stay just as you are, like cloth cooling at the edge of an ironing board; the heat the stranger left dissolves into the air within seconds, but the tingling under the ribs goes on aching like the roots of an uprooted sapling left open to the soil. I hate this armour. And whoever dressed me in it.

THE BOX

There is a cat at the far end of the garden; every morning it is there, not moving. I have never gone near it. If I did it would either get up and run or come and rub against my leg. One of the two would happen, and in that instant one of two sharp possibilities would die. As long as I watch from a distance, both stay alive: it will love me and it will run. I think it is that 'and' I love, not the cat.

There was a question in my head; I never went and asked it. There was a door; I never knocked. There was a sentence on the tip of my tongue, waiting there for years; I never said it. Because an unspoken sentence holds every answer at once. The moment it leaves my mouth it will fall into a single reality and the others will go out. It was not the words I loved, but that cloud of possibilities that had not yet collapsed.

I am no coward — let no one think it. A coward knows the outcome and runs; I choose not to know the outcome, so that every outcome stays possible.

Keep the box shut and the cat is both alive and dead, says science. We laugh at that; we take it for a laboratory fable. And yet everyone carries such a box in the heart: unopened, so that everything is still

possible; touched, and reduced at once to a single fate… That is why we never open the ones we love most. They sit there on the shelf, closed and infinite.

The cat in the garden was there again today. I looked; I did not go near. That distance of a few steps between us — it is the fullest thing I still own in this world, that emptiness.

THE WIND'S SHARE

Letters should not always find the one they
    were meant for,
so let the wind have this one too.

To scatter and be strewn is the dandelion's
    fate.
Neither the one who blows nor the wind is
    to blame.
Where it touches the soil it begins again,
    always from the beginning.
To be flung and to be endless is the
    dandelion's grief.

WINDOWLESS

That old wideness in the chest has given way to an exile with no borders you could name. Now we flinch at the echo of our own voice; as though the world were a song sung and finished long before us. Our steps fall not on the ground but into the chasms inside us.

We are windowless rooms, in truth. We think we are touching each other's lives, when in fact we tick in unison like clocks wound to the same fate. For years I knocked on the glass, never knowing the glass had never been there.

On the phone: "I'm fine." "I'm fine too." Neither of us is. After hanging up I hold the phone a while longer, as if something were left unsaid whose turn had not yet come. It never comes. Then I get up and turn on the light.

Even when we embrace, two skins remain between us. Even at our closest we are two separate warmths; the arms come loose, and no one sees the place where the loosening began.

Understanding that you were not heard takes far longer than not being heard.

LIKENESS

Someone should have come with roses in her hair to the rose garden in my heart; every rose of mine should have sworn it had never opened. I am not saying no one came; they came, they looked, they said "how lovely," and they left. But looking, it turns out, is not seeing; after them not one of my roses blushed.

Because everyone who passed through my garden gave me back nothing but my own sentence. When I spoke, the garden spoke; when I fell silent, a deep silence. The boy who bent over the water had learned this: the enchanted face he wanted to touch broke apart the instant he reached for it. The girl who watched him was no different; she could only whisper another's last syllables. She could not say her own name to the one she loved — all she could let him hear was the echo of his own voice.

Two strangers, one imprisoned in his own image, the other in somebody else's voice… Both of them wanted the same impossible thing: to overflow themselves and arrive at another.

If only a person could believe in a person, there would be no need for mirrors. Now I am simply waiting for a sentence that did not come out of my own mouth. When that day comes my roses will

blush; for the first time I will hear my own scent from someone else.

Because a flower grown used to its own scent forgets that it has one.

BEAUTY OF JUPITER

This is the mark of a red dagger driven into the planet's heart; a mute wailing fed on storm, making the darkness bleed with every thrash. A three-hundred-year-old cosmic wound — and yet it sits there like a beauty mark on your cheek: the one ornament chaos ever put on. Like the worlds you have fitted inside it, imprison my soul there until the end of days. Know that I will be in the very middle of this chaos, in the coolness of your paradise; with a cool burning… beauty of Jupiter. Let us catch like flames, hand in hand, until we are ash; let our steps stumble, let you fall into my arms until you turn to rose.

Every time we come closer the space between us widens by the length of a star. Reunion is not for us, we have understood that; for those who cannot be reunited another closeness remains — to scatter, everywhere at once. Since I could not fall into your arms, let me fall into the sky with you.

We have grown too grown-up for grand words; and small enough to shrink as we please. We divided ourselves again and again until we were a speck; on our dwindling surface our grief grew light. Now let us set out without arriving, arrive without holding a single moment — let the night shine inside us. As the

sun scatters the dark, a wound opened in the chest of the sky hides the stars with its own blood; that is why I could never love that yellow. Endless times we broke into fractals and were strewn across the chest of that immense sky. If you look up into the face of the sky tonight, you will see: all the stars will be us.

ENDLESS

We are the ones who tried to make others green before we had bloomed ourselves, and withered for it. Unaware of our own drought, falling as rain on other gardens, we were lessened, depleted, spent by the delusion of sacrifice. And so we were left with no choice: the inevitable metamorphosis that would be born from our own wreckage.

The sorrows that change brings, the farewells, the longings… And the person has broken, the dream has broken, the heart has broken; everything you would have sworn was solid… Then at last the day comes when a light seeps out of the broken place, sharp enough to burn the throat. Because the break is the only door light has. An unexpected laugh, a timid hello, and the restlessness begins again. Sometimes it hides in a glance, in a smile, or in an idea: that endless feeling which shakes a person at the root and brings him into being again.

But we are mistaken. What is endless is the breaking. In this flawless cycle, to break with flawed feelings is to ache towards spring through one's own fractures. And even if chasms open in between and that secret is left far behind, whoever remains goes on down the road, irreversibly made other. He breaks

and is made other, is made other and breaks again. Like the desire to be seen and to disappear, so breaking and becoming other: this is the endless cycle of the human, and has been since Adam.

ATHIRST

The worst thing about pain was never its severity but the fact that one can get used to it. After a while you find yourself startled not by the weight but by the moments without it; you wake up well one morning and grow uneasy, searching about as if you had mislaid something. You take the wound so thoroughly for your own that healing is lived as a kind of loss. This was the most dangerous prison of all: the one whose key we got used to.

There is a larger version of it: they call it world-pain — the shivering in that gap between the world as it is and the world as we imagined it ought to be. When it presses down, you want to vanish; you want not to be seen, not to be asked after, not to have a single letter of your name pronounced. Someone knocks and you do not move; you even hold your breath so they will believe you are out. Then the wave withdraws and the ache lets up — and in that very moment you want to be looked at, counted, given room in somebody's memory. This time it is you standing at the same door, hunting for an excuse to knock. We are athirst to be seen, and then we sulk at how little of us was seen.

Look at this impossibility: up in the sky it is daytime, bright and innocent; down on the earth evening fell long ago, the streetlamps are lit, the windows of the houses have filled with light. Something slips inside a person looking at that picture, and he grows uneasy without knowing why; yet nobody questions the contradiction — everybody looks and recognises it. Because this is exactly what a person is: evening fallen inside him while his sky is still light; wanting in the same instant to be seen and to be erased.

And we are like a watch that glows in the dark: for us to be seen, everything else has to go black first. And the phosphor burns down as it shines — every time we become visible we grow a little dimmer.

Why would a thing that knows it will end bind itself deeply to anything? That is why a person shies away from putting down roots. And puts them down anyway; he cannot help it. The harder he holds on, the more afraid he is. Every root sent deep is fed by the fear of being torn out; the further it is buried in the soil, the better it knows what uprooting means. Being seen works the same way: the more he is seen the deeper he roots, and the deeper he roots the more he dreads being pulled up.

The desire to be seen and to disappear — there it is, the life cycle of Fezaest.

BURIED IN THE SELF

All my life I buried a meaning underneath every decision I made; underneath every word, every gesture… I did it because I could not bring myself simply to live. Where are they now, all those meanings I buried so deep? Who understood me, who dived down with me to that hidden treasure? No one. Every buried thing rotted and mixed into the soil — and the soil was life; sweet as rotted fruit. I rotted too, on top of my own hoard. Now there is only me, and a me, and one more me. We can no longer be told apart, we have truly become one; who knows, perhaps we have ceased to be. And there was so much to be shared; only, plainly and simply… and a life to be lived; only, plainly and simply.

Now follow the trail of salt your own steps left behind; just before you turn to dust, watch the sunset, one last time. And say hello to all the suns not yet risen. Fit a million hellos into one — because every hello raises a farewell inside itself. And ask forgiveness, calmly, of that scream gnawing at your bones. Do not forget: this road was yours, your own choosing. And perhaps there was a life to be lived; only, plainly and simply.

MONOLITH

My mind is a pitch-black labyrinth; my soul a shadow wandering its turns; my thoughts run like tar. My feelings glow inwardly, like a black diamond — which was coal once too, a scream turned to stone by being crushed, by being buried under. All of it nested, all of one piece. I see what cannot be seen, and long for what can.

What I want now is to take a long walk somewhere I have never been; to lose my bearings, to disappear step by step along that thin line of the horizon without calling on a soul… To play hide-and-seek with my own soul while everything around me turns into scenery — not to catch it out, that is not what I mean; I mean to open the door of an absolute and merciful infinity where it can breathe freely — I don't know… How had I come to be, and how had I arrived at this absence?

CREATURE

There is a very fast spider on the wall of my room
running over the shadows as if fleeing its own apocalypse.
If I turned off the light, it too would vanish in this abandoned geometry.
I stopped, and laid the weight of existence on the spider

There is a very ugly spider inside my head
flying over the thoughts as if refusing its own apocalypse.
If I stopped thinking, it too would vanish in this abandoned mind.
I fell silent, and laid the weight of consciousness on the spider

There is a very heavy spider inside my chest
falling over the feelings as if loving its own apocalypse.
If I stopped feeling, it too would vanish in this abandoned body.
I retched, and could not lay the weight of love on it

MANY-COLOURED

I have been steeped in every colour — so what colour did I turn out? A brush that lost even a colour of its own. And yet it was the hope of being many-coloured that made us beautiful; the more I was steeped, the more each colour set its eye on the next. I understood then that this was a war of colours and the brush was the battlefield. The war ended, and I was the less for it.

What colours I had, taken prisoner by other colours. What colours I had, that lost their lives at the hands of others. Yellow went first; the lightest is always the quickest to surrender. It took me years to notice red was gone, because red does not cry out as it leaves — it only darkens, nobly.

I have heard that some soak themselves in thinner and wipe their past away. I could not bear to. Had I been wiped clean I would be spotless, yes — but I would never have been dipped in anything. In the end, cleanliness and never having touched a thing land in the very same place.

I look at myself now and not one colour on me still goes by its own name. In the mixing they all lost their identity; they melted into one another and turned

into a single thing. And how alive they were, standing side by side on the palette.

I was going to be many-coloured; I could not keep a single one. I took on all the colours, and not one of them stayed with me.

THE COLD OF THE LINING

In the mornings I arrive from somewhere, though not by any road. It is as if I am not the one opening my eyes; on the far side somebody closes theirs and I begin. I have no proof of it, but I am cold: whoever sits on the wrong side of the cloth knows the cold of the lining.

Last season a kite fell past me. Our strings were tangled; a knot of years, and neither of us had the heart to undo it. One evening the tie went slack — just like that, in the middle of a sentence — and it fell. And yet there was wind. There was always wind. For the first time I looked at the sky that long: did a hand grow tired, did a palm sweat, or did a sleeper simply turn over? Then I shouted. “Wake up!” I said. “If you can’t hold on, wake up and let it end; lift your eyelash, let us scatter, if this is how it is.” Then I went quiet. And I saw: the string hung on a while longer in the emptiness. Kiteless, hollow… not knowing the body it carried had gone. It went on swaying in its own breath, unaware of what it had lost, just like that, shamelessly.

Evening is coming down again; the bed drawn tight, the sheet a ramp. I lie down. My eyes close onto the same abyss every time: what if I have kites inside

me too? What if, the moment I lift my eyelash,
somewhere a season ends?

SEAGULL

Sometimes I say to myself: what a fine way to lose. How beautifully you lost every war. If I were to fight for something now and win, I would find my own victory strange. My losses were that beautiful. And what I won was whatever I had lost for. That is why my losses were beautiful.

The words I loaded into my pen in the small hours, the pages I riddled through without pity… Now there is a silent wailing on my tongue; I have buried myself in the notes, and so they take me for mute. The smile on my face looks as though it calcified at precisely the moment I was not smiling.

Luckily the morning sun is massaging my skin, so I cannot be angry at the seagulls. Otherwise the noise of them is unbearable, and you know it, you know it — so why do you still keep putting seagulls in your poems? Somebody ought to answer for this! Or don't — you would never hear a mute man anyway. And I am not angry with you, because the morning sun is still massaging my skin.

I never mentioned the handful of coloured sugar-shelled chickpeas in my hand. White was my favourite; white was the one that reminded me most of someone. So I ate the coloured ones first and hid

the white away. A whole handful of my most beautiful loss would be left, and I would grip it tight and watch for its colour to run into my sweating palm. Of course it never ran… There was no dye in it. It was not fake like the others; it was a real whiteness. And I learned this so late that by losing that purity I had lost the only real thing there was.

And nobody knew this, nobody knew — so why do you still keep putting seagulls in your poems? You don't even ask what a seagull is doing in this line… Never mind; the evening sun is massaging my skin, so I cannot be angry at anyone.

SPIRAL

A witness in the sky, one that makes you forget the room whose threshold you have just crossed. For an instant we looked at one another like two strangers; it kept the secret of the heights, I kept where my mind had gone. I do not know how many times we have met by now; every time it is like the first. In a smoothness I never find strange… never doubting that it is being lived for the first time.

That is why I no longer trust the first time. Because every new threshold carries on it the dust of roads already walked.

However much we slow time down and live our moments to the full, every moment we stop and look back at lies far from the present. All that is left of everything that flows past is frozen frames torn out of the current. Looking at an old photograph, I touch my own face to work out whether the smile in that frame really belongs to me; my fingers find me strange. Sometimes I cannot tell whether I lived those years or invented them.

Perhaps time is a spiralling whirlpool of hell; a vortex that swallows us, in which we mistake arriving at the same moment for arriving at the same place. At every turn that witness in the sky is before me again,

at every turn for the first time — I am not going forward; with my own steps I am turning along the same arc.

LOW

I put the seconds on the scales one by one, entered their weights in a notebook, peeled the rind off every moment and sealed its stone with the mark of my teeth — that is, I lived, if this is what living is.

Then an ambulance went through me: a scream coming in, a droning going out. So moments obey the same law; whatever was shrieking at my ear while I lived it speaks from under the ground when I turn to look. That summer yellow — the one that crackled on my tongue like boiling salt — if I look at it now it is only a low murmur: the voice of the colour has thickened, and speaks from a register close to the soil. I know the smell of the present too: that violet daze just before rain, and the hot filings of freshly cut iron — by the time it reaches my nose it has already passed.

And the other day somebody called after me, by name. I turned; nobody there. It was an old voice, thickening as it travelled, only now able to catch up with me. Perhaps it was said years ago, perhaps it has not been said yet; a voice keeps no calendar — maybe it dropped its own along the way. That is why I keep shouting my own name into the future, wondering at which corner and at what age I will turn to look — and

not knowing whether what I hear that day will be a droning, or only the sound of somebody swallowing.

KEEPSAKE

A photograph in my hand — how I have missed you. I am standing at the mirror now, trying to copy that smile of yours; it will not come, something is always missing from it. How strong you were, how reckless. Your hair was as untidy as your life in your maddest year. You never had your wits about you in those lovely years — and perhaps that is why the years were lovely. And that blue… Doesn't everything begin with the blue carrying us off? Perhaps it is to blame for all this dwindling.

On your wrist was a watch you never looked at; a little above it, a mole. You did not care what you were late for; time held no authority over you. You walked not inside time but on top of it. Answering to nobody, calling nobody to account and making no calculations — as though you had some old quarrel with arithmetic.

Then something happened. I do not quite know what; there was never a sharp day for it either — everything faded slowly. First you gave up fighting, then your voice, and last of all that smile. Now the corner of your lip does not curve to the same place.

I still have that watch; it sits on my wrist. Except now I look at it every minute — you never once turned to look at it.

There is only me in the photograph. There always was.

That blue was only the sky stretching out behind you. In the top left corner, a small cloud. Your sun went, your smile went, you went — and out of that day one cloud remains, a keepsake. It has stood there twenty years without breaking up.

THE GREY HOUR

It is so very late that we may call it early by and by. Juliet's father says this, to the untimely man who has come asking for his daughter.

I slept for years in the arms of that sentence. I kept the night the way one keeps a watch: at two, the water drying on my tongue; at three, the cold glass I rested my forehead on; at four, the cat in the garden smelling the darkness — it was awake too, it was waiting for something too. And towards five the sky turns that grey; belonging to neither day nor night, it is not a colour but a possibility. I spent the longest season of my life inside that possibility.

I never looked at the contacts on my phone; your name had long since been wiped from the memory of my devices. But your number stayed in my mind, a rosary of eleven beads. Perhaps by now those digits opened onto other people's voices, who knows. At one point I took the guitar down from the wall, ran my fingers through the dust on the strings, did not play, put it back. But I would not let anyone sell it either. On the platform I watched the train pull out and did not run; there will be another, I said, of course there will, why wouldn't there be. I did none of it, and I gave none of it up. Not giving up was a kind of

morning in me; it was not light, but the possibility of light. And all the while, like a whale, I was slowly running aground on the shores of nihilism without even noticing. My bones ached a little more each day; whether that was ageing or the damage of being human, I could never tell.

Then last week I stopped in front of the bookcase, looking for something. I did not find what I was looking for, but on the shelf I met Cioran's eye. There he stood, his spine turned to me and yet looking. He said nothing — and what was there to say, he had written all of it. I did not move either, for a while. My hand stayed up in the air, then remembered its own weight.

Whatever it was that lived in that grey hour, it is gone. Now it is either day or night.

SNUK

That reckless cycle of a life: watching Mad Jack the Pirate through to the end and switching straight over to MTV for Enrique Iglesias. Whether it is childhood I miss or recklessness, I cannot put a name to it. Deep in longing, I long for longing. I take it on so completely that my name ought to be Longing — or perhaps I ought to be the thing itself.

There are earthquakes every day now; what I call 'now' is the rubble of time. And trapped inside the now, a refugee who looks like me. He has no house, no night, no day. He has only one dream: to become time itself. I asked him why. Time is what I long for, he said. Time was the longing of a refugee imprisoned in the present.

And so I understood: we do not want to reach the thing we long for, we want to become it. We want to be a woman, or a man; we want to be time; we want to be reckless. Not to arrive at it — to be it…

There was a child once, sitting cross-legged in front of the screen; he was late for nowhere, he missed nothing — because there was nowhere else. I do not want to go back to those days; I want to be that child.

Every child dreamed of being Mad Jack, of course; but life also had being Snuk in store. And sometimes

the longing runs so deep that in that bottomless longing — the one that fits inside no single thing and flows to the lowest place — all that is left in our hands is the longing itself. We forget what we were longing for; we do not forget the longing. As though this were the substance left when everything else is peeled away; as though there were nothing for it but to become longing.

THE HOLLOW

That childhood smell that arrives out of nowhere — the smell of a damp towel in the bathroom of the summer house — where did it seep into this evening from?

It is as if this armchair, this table, these walls speak another language among themselves while I am out, and fall silent the moment I come in. The way a word said forty times is stripped of its meaning, so when I look in the mirror long enough I sense that my nose does not belong to me. My memory is like the edge of a table scratched at with a fingernail; it makes you forget what it was hiding, but my finger always catches on the groove. Once I saw a hat fall from the window of a train carriage; its owner did not even turn to watch it go. There are days I let go of exactly like that, still inside me.

In those hours when the sky is neither blue nor grey, in those in-between times, a ferry horn is always sounding inside me. In this city with no sea, among the kitchen smells seeping out of the stairwells, how many floors down into myself can I go? And like a building with a broken lift at that: out of breath, looking at somebody else's doormat on every landing.

An old cinema ticket that had fallen behind the drawer; I remember not the film but the person beside me. And yet I have completely forgotten the little mole on the left side of that face. My mind feeds on itself like a leech; every new memory grows by swallowing the corpse of an older one.

What I really am is a long, silent corridor endlessly rehearsing conversations that never happened. When the phone screen flares in the dark I turn into a museum. And the rarest piece in that museum is forgetting a person's voice while knowing the rhythm of their laugh by heart.

Walking along watching my reflection in shop windows, I try to match my steps to those of the stranger coming up behind me. Where does this sense of rhythm come from — are we all obeying the conductor of the same invisible orchestra? In the sound of paper being folded one last time before a letter goes into its envelope, it seems to me that every farewell in the world lies hidden. Words are so heavy that sometimes I tire of carrying them in my mouth and want to set them down in a corner, at the foot of the nearest lamp post. And it is when I am late for myself that I understand most clearly that the road has ended; at the departure time of that last train whose ticket I bought but whose platform I could never find.

The sound of the refrigerator working in the kitchen at midnight gives me the feeling that I am keeping company with the only living organism in the house. Without that steady, boring murmur I think the walls would come down on me; because silence is always the herald of something accumulating. Gathering the breadcrumbs on the table with my fingertip, I notice that life too is this effort to bring small, unimportant pieces together. But those crumbs never add up to a whole loaf; always a little short, always a little stale, always the kind that catches in the throat. And what a strange interruption it is when a thought, just about to be born, is paralysed forever by the ringing of the doorbell.

Yesterday, in the bright pitch-black bead of the eye of a crow perched on the balcony rail, I saw my own shrunken reflection. And I understood that the world is not as large as I thought; it is only a room narrow enough to fit inside a bird's pupil. In that room I move the furniture around and imagine I am inventing new lives for myself. Forgetting is not the slow erasure of the titles of the books in a library; it is the pages sticking to one another until they become a single block. You can no longer open it, or read it; you only know that it stands there as a weight.

And now, where these lines end, that kerbside where I stopped to shake out the little stone that had

got into my shoe turns out to have been the longest-lasting decision of my life — and I had thought I had merely stopped walking.

MUTE

In a strange room, a strange voice,
touches a secret in me that never was.
The frost of a climate whose name I do not know
exiles me to that ash which never cools.

So many, it turns out, in the same emptiness,
waiting to be lessened by the same silent letter.
As a silken ache pours out its final sentence,
somebody else wakes in a nothingness of their own.

This is a shadow that strikes the calendars mute,
wearing out so many winters, shedding nothing of itself.
Sometimes, in the place where a syllable is swallowed,
all that no universe could hold remains.

SANDALWOOD

I don't know what time it is.
Shadows are walking on the ceiling of the room,
footprints in my sleep.
I am a ship lost in the groundwater of this city,
my compass rusted.
The crackle of an old record spills from behind the curtain.
Thoughts that have lost their bearings in an aquarium
keep knocking into one another.
I can't tell you that I miss you.
If you knew,
you would think that you missed me.

Somewhere a train is pulling out, I'm sure of it,
nothing in its carriages but desolation.
I am roughing the words up on purpose tonight,
or else they will rough me up.
If I make proper sentences it will hurt.

Your perfume had the smell of my
favourite book
sandalwood, maybe
I wonder if you could build a boat out of
sandalwood
Look, I've drifted into the aquarium again
I can't tell you that I miss you
If you knew, what I'm afraid of
is that you would think you missed me

Look, I've forgotten the time again
I checked a moment ago
You forget things, turning into a poem with
you

All sorts of things
The moon, the stars and the galaxies…
I'd have liked to say something about the
universe
but today I don't feel like leaving the house
at all
I'll just go down to the market and buy
parsley
I don't even like it, and still I always buy it
because it reminds me of you
I don't know, maybe it's the way you turn
up in every poem of mine like parsley
Look, I've taken a moth for a butterfly
again
Did they trick you like this too
They always trick me

Whoops, drifted into the aquarium again
I am roughing the words up on purpose
tonight,
If I make proper sentences it will hurt.

Right now I'd settle for an alien invasion
By the way,
did I ever tell you I saw a UFO
I hadn't.
I never saw one, so how was I supposed to
    tell you
I think their colour is parsley green
the aliens', I mean
Have you ever noticed
there's never enough heat in hot pepper
    paste
Don't ask what that has to do with
    anything, just think of it next time you
    eat some
You'll agree with me
I call it painless paste now

The hour hand chases the minute hand, the
minute hand chases me
A yellow ink is dripping from the ceiling
The green sleep of the days is going
mouldy inside me.
If you remember, I was a ship
I ran into a geyser and it flung me
Fish with their scales shed took my body in
A long-haired octopus wrapped itself
around my wound,
and my wooden heart caught fire right
there
Then we fell silent

If there's nothing you want to say
I'm drifting into the aquarium again
I can't talk while I'm in the aquarium
anyway
which is why I can't tell you that I miss you
If I do,
it will hurt.

THE ROUGH SPOT

Six in the morning. A woman's name on the screen; beside it her age, beside that the number of places she was struck. I scroll. A child has been pulled out from under the rubble and is squinting — three days in the dark, and the first thing he sees is not light but a camera. I scroll. Below that, somebody has shared their breakfast by a pool; a thousand likes underneath. My thumb passes over them in a hurry, and they pass through me in no hurry at all.

It makes me angry. But if we were to carry water to the fire in our palms now, all that would be left in our hands is steam.

There was a time when light was needed; now everywhere is lit and nobody can be seen. Nobody woke up one morning and decided to go bad. Everyone simply became a little more practical: not looking is restful, not hearing saves time, and not grieving is the cheapest of all.

Something goes quiet inside us, one after another. It has not gone quiet in me yet; that is all.

I know before the weather turns, before anybody has seen a cloud. It begins in an old part of me; it does not show on an X-ray. In some people that place fell silent long ago, and they cannot say when. In me

it never closed: a small rough spot was left inside, a rough spot that speaks before the weather turns. We do not call a man sound because nothing hurts him; we say he has sealed himself off from the world a little too well, that nothing gets through any more.

So do not call it a burden. Werther came along once, and the young put that pain on like a jacket; they turned even the truest ache into the fashion of a season. But nothing aches in an imitator before the weather turns.

If you ache, you are whole. Whatever is smooth was left unfinished there.

SHANTY

As though I had time for everything and nothing were the right thing to do just now. So much time, and a life so unable to find its place…

When our graceful attempt to find meaning in life has been so roughly scattered, how is human consciousness supposed to withstand this intellectual tsunami? It doesn't, of course. How many bricks of your shanty does every brick you lay bring down in the same instant? Don't ask.

Bury the wreckage inside you in the night; in the morning you have to go back to the absurd routine of living. Because life expects us to be not a creature of flesh and bone but a robot that resets itself after every blow.

And all we need is to stop, to feel, and to break the way a human being breaks.

Sadly, we were taught that not collapsing is a sign of strength — which was in fact a savagery.

Still looking for the meaning of life? Never mind. The only thing expected of you is that you be everyone.

WAX

Today too somebody was defeated, and nobody heard. Somebody locked a door behind them for a while; their face was wet when they came out, and the keyboard was still warm when they got back to their desk. Somebody hung up the phone and looked a long time at their cold coffee. A sentence had to be swallowed; it settled inside, and there it will stay. None of it made the news. Defeats never shouted.

One morning I stopped too. Without telling anyone, I went on strike alone: I did not get up, did not go, did not exist. I took this for a revolution. Then I looked out of the window; the bus went past, the bakery was open, the neighbour opposite parted her curtain at the usual hour. The bitterest thing about a strike of one is not going unnoticed; it is that the wheel turns at the same speed even in the place where you have stopped. Your place does not stay empty — not even your emptiness stays empty.

The cruellest habit the world has is its punctuality. Even on your worst day the alarms ring at the hour they were set, the bread bakes, the sun is not a second late. That sun has been working for years and has never once called in sick; it never tired and came late,

and it never rose an hour later the next morning because somebody had died.

And yet, for a single life to make a revolution, the universe would have to falter once. Once. If for one morning the sun did not rise. If every defeat fell silent at the same moment and for one day it were our turn. It does not happen. We know it will not, and still, every evening as we put our heads down, some part of us is watching for that possibility.

The sun never falters; and we are still made of wax.

ADDRESSEE

The time-freezing cosmic dance of two black holes that have swallowed every star around them; never merging, suspended forever…

Whatever does not snap where it thinned will wound where it did not snap.

We thinned. And so long as we did not snap, we were wounded; that is all. Then we were buried deep.

But we were buried so deep that while we lived nobody came even near us. We, that is, me and me… This was your absence.

The moment you stop subtracting yourself so generously, you see how quickly those great loves evaporate. Because people love the comfortable room you made for them more than they love you. This never changes. It leaves an enormous emptiness behind. And then that emptiness leaps inside you.

The black hole inside me is growing; its event horizon is pressing at my ribs. Now, merely to be able to go on, I would have to put my arms around the sun.

I waited with dawns charring in my palms. My skin ached like wounded ground on which even one drop of rain hurts. Those doorways I kept my eyes fixed on turned every night into mute walls falling on me. The

pitch-blackness seeping from my fingertips drowned, one by one, the lamps that were watching for my road. The scream gathering in me is so heavy, so ungainly, that whatever wind I catch hold of I drag down into the abyss behind me.

This silent quarrel I keep having with myself is the quarrel of never having had anything worth quarrelling over. Whether a life is short or long, which changes depending on where you stand to look at it… I simply cannot tell; not what it came from nor what it came through, not its line nor its lineage…

If I were to curse now, I would not even know the addressee. At whom, at what? What I am after is not enlightenment; it is somebody to receive my curse. Whatever I do, the echo turns back and strikes my own face. Most of all I sharpen myself against that mute emptiness which seals my voice. We are two strangers beating in my chest now; one already gone, the other as though it had never been.

ANGLES

What a person longs for is not to explain himself but to be spared having to. All our conversations are really the minutes of that longing; every sentence a confession that the one before it was not enough. Once a distance came between me and somebody who had been very close; the kind of distance where you cannot tell who let go and who arrived too late. Years later we ran into each other and sat down. The beers came, then another, then another; the more we drank the looser we grew, but the more we opened up the less we said — with all the longing of the intervening years, we kept silent at the top of our lungs. We called each other to account, not by asking why but by saying nothing. Real friends never asked what they already knew the answer to. To be able to sit in silence beside someone you never have to explain yourself to... That thing we could never name is perhaps only this.

But when there is nobody to be silent with, a person starts manufacturing meaning. That is our greatest helplessness: if a thing has no meaning we invent one, and if we cannot find one we build it. We cannot look into empty space without seeing a shape there. We are made of moments, we are nothing but moments, and we are flung about inside them. Then

we draw a direction through the flinging and call it fate.

For a person wedged into the triangle of explaining, being understood and searching for meaning, the sum of the interior angles is one hundred and eighty degrees. And the sum of the interior anguish — how many degrees is that? No instrument has been built yet to measure it; and if one had been, nobody would hold out an arm.

Walking our own straight line, unaware of the adjacent anguish, we pin our hopes on parallels we have never once crossed. And yet sometimes it happens: somebody you have not called in years calls on the very evening you were thinking of them. There is no cause at all; no line has touched another. But a person cannot bear causelessness; he believes the two lines have met not in space but in meaning. And the moment he believes it, they have met. It is only in geometry, after all, that parallels never cross.

In the geometry of a person, which one mattered — the complementary angle, or the supplementary anguish? Perhaps whatever we measure, we are only covering over what cannot be measured…

CONDEMNED

The instant a person is thrown into the world, isn't he thrown straight into the arms of a lifelong effort to claim the things he never chose? Why then should he insist on the regret of what he did choose and dig his heels in there? Wouldn't that take from him even the little he had left?

Shouldn't freedom be the only sentence we serve? What meaning would our choices keep if giving them up were not possible? Isn't the real price the holding out, the patience?

Could finding your own face strange in the mirror one morning be the first symptom of it? And which day was that; was there such a day at all, or was there never one?

As long as we do not cry out who we are, who is this world that says it in our place? And after a while, don't we come to believe what it says? And isn't the greatest betrayal of a self shaped by the pressure of what will people say a betrayal of that same self?

Does growing tired of asking count as an answer?

THE SKY TURNED AWAY

No word consoles this desolation, and no hand reaches down into the depths of the well. A person has been left behind; to the darkness of silent space, to the emptiness of dulled time… Either by another's hand, or by his own.

Even the wind has fallen silent; all that is left is that old droning. At the end of roads that bend back into themselves, alone in this vastness. Like a traveller who loses his bearings as he loses his horizon, a person stands in the middle of the night waiting for a flare from far away. And yet no ship puts in at this harbour, and there is no sound but the waves; once again we wait for the storm to be stilled by the storm.

There was a woman who waited twenty years on the shore. Whatever appeared on the horizon she took for him, and every time it turned out to be another ship. After twenty years she could not recognise the man standing at her door. Was it a man she had been waiting for, or news of one, or had she long since become the waiting itself — nobody ever asked her.

Sometimes I lie down on the carpet and look at the ceiling; but not as a simple act of looking. More as if I were tearing through the ceiling first and then

through the blue dress, bringing a whole reality down with it. By the time I turn back she has already put on her black dress and pinned on her pale yellow brooch. The ceiling is still where it was. Such is the healing power of lying down on a carpet. I do not know how long it lasted, nor what I was waiting for.

In this country we have appointed ourselves the guards of our own desolation; our eyes on the shores of distant seas, we are shut inside that small, trembling refuge within us. Like a lighthouse forgotten along a border, a person drowns in his own light.

RED

Hotter inside than out,
a red fire engine
goes past, its rusted siren sobbing.
Everyone pulls over to the side, but
nobody looks in through the window.
The relentless fire that began in its engine
is moving now towards its own tank.
It has turned the hose on its own chest,
thrashing madly to put out its heart.
But the pressured water was not quelling
    the flame;
it was drowning in its own smoke,
that great shuddering body of it.

A fire engine —
could it ever drown in the water it sprayed
    itself?
Well, it is drowning…

Nobody understood,
nobody came to its fire,
because putting fires out was its job.
It had wanted to be red;
how was it to know
that its heart would end up coal…

SUVEYDÂ[1]

I held my breath,
a tale I had forgotten is seeping out of your hair

The world is a sitting room now, its haste left at the door
and in the very middle of it, a field of poppies that makes my face smile.
Their stems like slender bones holding up the sky
I listen in silence to your hair flying in the wind

The sun is burning my letters in this red field
and their smoke is rising in your laugh
This is the rehearsal of a revolt that breaks the heart's sleep,
that ember-amber bursting up from seven layers beneath the ground
as if nature were spreading its secret diary open in front of me.

[1] Suveydâ: in Sufi thought, the black point at the centre of the heart — the seat of the innermost self, and of whatever it keeps hidden.

A living minefield I am afraid to step into
I don't understand why I am covered in red
I'm certain I never stepped on a mine
Or did I fall in the field
At one point I was rocking like a cradle,
I don't remember what came after
Maybe it was a swing, and you pushed…
Maybe a dream…

Yes, it was a dream, I remember now
I fell while running in a field of poppies
When I opened my eyes their red petals
    were
a sleep of silk spread over life
I saw the night hidden in the heart of that
    poppy,
as though I had come face to face with the
    black stain in my own heart.

Then I said to myself, oh, at last!
The construction workers inside my head
have finally knocked off,
the traffic on the grey motorway of my
heart has completely cleared.
Then all at once that warm smell of fresh
bread
came down on my nose like a fist
Heavy-handed, I said, but I wasn't angry
These misunderstandings happen now and
then
But my nose is still smarting —

Then the bins went over with a clatter
Caught off guard again
They're always startling a person
And I understood in that moment
that we had stayed up until morning
together again
The bin lorry was my good morning
and my goodnight

Lately it always goes like this, for some
reason
The minibus I get on at one stop
puts me down at a stop I don't know
I don't remember how I got here
I was only in a field of poppies
I was running
And then I fell
And theeen
I don't remember what came after.

THE BENDS

My poems could have floated on the waves; they could have taken shelter in the safest harbours, could have come ashore on islands of green stone. But I drowned them in the deep and fed them to the sorrowful fish. I wanted my poems to resemble me; or else me, them.

Sponge divers know it: nobody looks at what stays near the surface. What is prized lies at the bottom, in the place light gave up on. So you go down, and you go down again; each time you look a little lower. That is what I did. If a sentence struck me as beautiful it was never enough; I looked to see what lay under it, and then went under whatever I found.

Last summer I sat facing the sea as the sun went down. It was so beautiful that I composed a sentence in my head at once; then I corrected the sentence, changed a word in it, changed it again. By the time the sun had set I had a good line. I do not remember the setting.

They call it the bends; the damage is done not at the bottom but on the way up. Some are left paralysed, some never surface at all. The strange thing is that we use the same word when somebody falls for another person: taken. So our language knew

it long ago — the price of going down and the price of being taken are one and the same.

A diver coming up confuses the hour he went down. These days everything gets confused in me too; the meanings tangle as they embrace. My memory misleads me — which of them came first? Though what does the past matter…

Could anyone ever look to a nostalgic yellow for help against the autumn yellow of what is coming?

THE ALTAR OF THE FUTURE

Accepting the greeting of two solitudes, a person cannot help asking: doesn't sacrificing today for the sake of some future reunion turn hope into one's own scaffold rather than into a stone of patience? Doesn't every moment we answer with 'as you wish' take a little of that hope away?

Tomorrow was never a clean page, only a shroud stained with the blood of today. And yet everything should have roared like a river whose dams have burst; those arrogant dams of the time called tomorrow, the time that never comes, should have been brought down. The sediment of waiting collects at the bottom of me. We throw our youth to the insatiable appetite of the future, and the lines of our faces, and the sweat in our palms. We had a present that was waiting to be touched; it lies dying now on the altar of that unknown reunion. Every second sacrificed is a handful of earth flung in our faces.

And when the time comes, in what language will they greet one another? Two strangers, two shadows, two disappointments will be what is left. Is hope the silk rope in the executioner's hand, that it should not burn us every time it winds around our necks?

Knot by knot, the throat of the present tightens. What a grief. When we are finally reunited we will have no eyes left to look at each other with, because our eyes will be those cracking stones of patience… The hands that were to touch will be callused, the breath we were to draw will smell of tobacco from all the waiting. And what are we now, in that dried-up riverbed, but two pieces of stone that cannot touch each other?

And still: as you wish. What else do we know how to do but greet one another…

KNIFE'S EDGE

Don't worry: one day you will find a way to have love without falling in love. It will taste exactly like decaffeinated coffee, like alcohol-free beer — riskless, light and false.

But real love is not flawless, and it is certainly not harmless. The price of that taste is paid dearly: every order you had built until then is broken, the routines you sheltered in come apart. You always went to work down the same street; now you go the long way, two stops further. For the first time you don't turn up to the meeting you had not missed in years, and you don't even invent an excuse. Your bedtime has shifted without your noticing: the man who has gone to bed at eleven for years is now up until four, and is not complaining either. Somebody settles at the centre of your life, in front even of your own shadow; and what you would never do for yourself you do for them without a second thought.

You wait to be shaped again by them, like modelling clay. And you try the same on them — if they are in love, they let you. When love is mutual this is exactly where it arrives, the most dangerous place of all: the chance of destroying two lives in one stroke and the chance of turning them into the loveliest in

the world, both of them balanced on the same knife's edge.

Love is walking that edge without thinking which side you will fall on. Think, and it will not happen. Love that is planned, love that is foreseen, is not love; it can only be lived, recklessly. And it holds the strings itself, tugging the two of you along — not even it knows which way it will let you fall.

THE WIND IS CALLING ME

I heard it.
I closed my eyes, and the meadows walked
into me.
When you think of me I appear beside you;
when I think of you I leave myself behind
in you.
That summer woken by the whisper of
your hair
is now the one poppy that has taken root in
my chest.

I saw it.
There in the middle of those meadows,
as you turned back into a child,
the world was the size of your eyes.

A COOLNESS FORGOTTEN ON THE TABLE

And then there is running into you in the very middle of this life; in the beauty of the plain, in the plainness of the beautiful. Your name is like walking the world with the astonishment of its first day. A sound echoing through the passages of my mind, light as the feeling of a bird, free as the sky. I wake into a dream with a faintly bitter taste in my mouth and a scent in the room — no telling where from, honey-coloured and light. The smell of summer, childhood evenings, a coolness forgotten on the table…

I have been thinking, in this silence that breaks the night: the heart should never go to anybody at all, it should stay in its own house. Perhaps that is exactly why it was put in that dark cage of ribs, to keep it well behaved; behind tightly shut bars, so it could not slip its ties and run off into the unknown. But the moment it sees you, how the wretched thing wants to fly, how that mad riddle will not fit inside its vessel; it wants to make my chest bleed and take wing from the wound, as though every chain had fallen off it at once. Perhaps everything kept under a shell is like this: calm until it splits, and filling the whole room the instant it does.

Everything I have loved in this world until today, everything I have gathered along with its ache: from the old warmth left on my lips by my first bottle to the paint-worn toys in the shadowed corner of my room; to the books whose pages I turned by smelling them; to that yellow T-shirt I never wanted to take off until it fell apart; to the films I watched over and over and never had enough of; to those enchanted lines scribbled in secret at the edges of notebooks after midnight; to the stray cats I sheltered with in the rain; to a hot meal my mother set down in front of me; and to all those people I loved who once stood beside me, and whose places have since gone cold…

If I could gather into a single palm the love of everything that will come to my mind and touch my heart; if I could swell like an enormous avalanche over the waves and build a whole new universe out of those ancient, unmixed feelings. And then love you as much as the sum of all of it, with the weight and the purity of every last one.

Because loving you, living you breathlessly, is like throwing the dusty windows of the world wide open. The colours are sharper now and a person is less alone. I fell hard for you; perhaps I lost my balance, and I was light as a leaf let go over a cliff. Then I fell into poetry, into those bottomless, healing waters of words that strike a person everywhere at once. I fell

into you and into poetry in the same instant; the tone of your voice and the syllables spilling onto the page ran into one another. Perhaps you are the same thing…

Like the invisible pen of a poet, you touch the bleeding, broken, unlooked-at places of life. If I could bind even one small wound in you, I know that somewhere deep down a wound of mine would heal too. To heal in the same place, to find each other by feel in the dark, to hold fast to this world by invisible ties.

I know how your eyes light up when that yellow coolness is set on the table. Let every flavour in the world stand aside; you take that slice, and at the first bite you close your eyes and say, that's it. That is what summer has come to mean in me: the smell of the thing you love.

Now I blow into that lovely hair of yours every 'how good that you exist' I have been keeping in my palms, and quietly go. This scattered stream of consciousness I leave behind me is the last sound of my heart striking you and echoing through the rooms. And all the while I was only sitting in the kitchen with a plate of melon in front of me. Ever since I put the fork in, the whole house has smelled of loving you — so it was the melon that wrote all this, and not me at all.

THE KEY

The house key escapes every evening in
this house.
I check the right pocket of my coat, empty;
the left pocket, empty.
I turn the bag upside down;
a whole life spills onto the carpet, and still
no key.
Then I go and look in that bowl on the
kitchen counter,
and there it sits, right in the middle; we
look at each other a while.
I know perfectly well I set it down there
myself five minutes ago.
And still I dig through the coat pockets,
behind the wallet.
As if, were that key really lost,
it might open onto another life.
As if staying here were a decision of my
own…
I take it from the bowl and hang it on the
nail behind the door;
so that tomorrow evening I can fail to find
it in my pockets again.
The nail will stay where it is, and I will
forget the nail.

Whenever I went off leaving my books
behind,
my primary school teacher used to say,
"You should have forgotten yourself as
well."
More or less did, sir.
But don't worry;
I am wherever I put myself,
I just don't look there.

NEW WORLD ORDER

In the morning I had the baker slice my bread. When I got home I noticed the little end piece was missing. Had a thick slice gone from the middle it would not have troubled me half as much. But that small end — there it is, Murphy, the cause of every mishap I am going to have today. Some people are the same: with one, the more room they take up in our lives the less effect they have; with another, the smaller they grow the more they weigh. And then you find yourself carried from the missing corner of a loaf to the people who went missing — well then, let us be carried.

I left the bread on the counter and tore a piece off the crust for my mouth; it was going stale, which means somewhere I am going stale too. The garden is visible from the window. The loquat tree is there, where it always is — in Turkish we call it yenidünya: new world. Every year around this time it yellows and ripens and falls prey to the children; this year it has seen so little sun that it is still deep green. Perhaps this is the new world order, I don't know. Picture a fruit that could not ripen because it never found the sun — and yet I look at it as though it had chosen to stay unripe: never sweetened, so as never to rot; kept

safe by not coming of age. I almost envied it. I went down into the garden.

A cat appeared among the grass, from wherever cats appear from; it looked at me, one of those old looks — as if it knew me and didn't, or didn't know me and did. It made a question mark of its tail and went off along the top of the wall without waiting for the answer. I had not asked anything anyway. The neighbour's door slammed, then an engine coughed, then somebody leaning on a horn like an animal — what is there to be on time for at this hour of the morning? Nobody will say. Everyone late for somewhere. Perhaps I am too, but I have forgotten where; the appointment is still standing, the address wiped off.

Then that sound. Coming from far off, swelling from the other end of the neighbourhood: "Waterme-e-elon!" A call that melts in the crackle of the loudspeaker and gathers itself together again. A pickup truck, its bed full, the man sitting up on top like a king. I flagged him down. He picked one from the very bottom and knocked at its ear — that dull, solid note, which means it is full inside. I bought it and carried it home; heavy, warm, impatient, as though I were carrying a summer in my arms.

I sank the knife in. That crack — the sound a rind makes as it comes apart in two, like a seal being broken. Out of it came a future, dripping; red, fresh, not yet lived. But the seeds — those black seeds were the past; each one a memory caught in the middle of a bite, waiting to be chewed. And in that moment I understood what kind of bargain taste is: if you want to taste the future you have to spit out the past. I took a slice into my mouth and chewed; whatever was sweet I swallowed, and whatever was hard — the seeds, the dates, the names — I spat into my palm. A handful of past, wet and black, sitting in my hand. Strange: the sweetest bite turned out to be the one with the most seeds. So the juiciest future is the one that has stored the most past inside it.

The more I spat the lighter I became. As the palms filled, the mouth emptied; on one side I am eating the future, on the other I am gathering the past in my hand, and both are coming out of the same fruit. Then I scattered the seeds into the garden — maybe one will take, maybe one day there will be a sapling here, a shade grown out of the memories I spat. The loquat still stood green in front of me, in that unripeness the lack of sun had woven for it. I looked at it, and I looked at the wet past in my hand. One never came of age and keeps its seed hidden inside; the other came of age, was eaten, and gave its seeds back. Which of us

is the loquat and which the watermelon — that I could not work out.

By the time I sat in the garden that evening the sun had long gone down. The seeds had dried in my palm and turned into little stones. This time I did not fling them into the soil; I put them in my pocket. The man who spat in the morning to make himself lighter understood by evening that when you throw everything away there is neither a taste left on the palate nor a man left inside. So that short loaf in the morning had been right after all: nothing comes into our lives whole, and every story begins with one edge missing. But without that gap, where would a new summer fit? I looked at the loquat tree, dark green, still holding out, still unripened. Let those who choose to stay unripe stand where they are — I would be one of those who bite and pay the price of the seed. A few dried pasts in my pocket, and that tart sweetness that will not leave my palate… Tomorrow perhaps I would buy the loaf whole; but I knew I would come up short again — or else I would go looking for the shortfall somewhere else.

CONTAGIOUS

There was a time when I envied the screaming of seagulls, because I could not cry out at life as freely as they do... And now I envy this many-coloured laugh of yours, and that unconditional friendship you have with the sky.

But it is such a lovely, such a wholehearted envy... While I sit in corners confiding in shadows, I marvel at how the trees come alive where you step, how the birds beat their wings towards you, how you carry the sun on your face. If only, I say to myself; if only my pen could smile at life like that, from head to foot.

Mine is such a black humour that if I happened to wave at a passenger plane in the sky, it would be no trouble at all for it to turn suddenly, up there among the clouds, into that missing Malaysian aeroplane...

And now, in the misted emptiness that plane flew into, a white sheet of paper suddenly lights up. Like a contagious sky... An uninvited rhythm seeps into my fingertips, and the words waiting their turn inside me wake without hurry.

Where this complaint of mine ends, my ink opens up and takes on something of your colour. May your heart always talk with birds like this; because your sky is quietly widening my walls.

WORTH

Sometimes at night you see somebody lying so still in their sleep that something stops inside you. You go closer without a sound; your eyes hunt for the rise and fall of the quilt, that tiny stirring of breath. And when you find it you draw a deep breath yourself — and what a breath that is. What fills your lungs is not really air but peace. Only those who have faced, for one instant, the possibility of losing that person know the taste of it.

If only a person could know this without first being diminished. But it does not work that way. Strangely, even my own language whispers the truth of it: in Turkish, side by side is written as two words and utterly apart as one. What ought to stand closest stands with a gap between, and what is furthest away stays joined. And take a single letter from kıyamet, the apocalypse, and what is left is kıymet: worth. So it seems we learn what a thing is worth from the gap left behind by the piece that broke away.

Whenever I draw that breath I go back to the same night. I am two and a half years old. New Year's Eve, the night we went into ninety-five, in the house we still live in today… A moment ago everybody was here and the lights were on. Now there is nobody; only a

night lamp in the room. On legs that barely carry me I go from room to room looking for them all. I cannot find them. That first emptiness inside me, the one I have no name for yet.

Then I push a door open. My mother. My father. My sister. There they are, all of them… I have not forgotten the breath I drew into my lungs in that moment, not in thirty years. My memory may have erased everything else, but it kept that. Whenever peace fills me I push that door open again. And I am two and a half again, and I have found them again.

THE BROKEN GLASS

Did it slip from a hand, or was it broken on purpose?
Never mind, my friend,
the water that cooled us was drunk long ago!

Let the glasses break, what of it?
So long as the joy inside them isn't spilled on the floor.
Even on those pieces of broken glass
we would dance barefoot, you and I.

What a beautiful night you are; I want to throw my arms around the dark,
because I know that at the far end of this mad cheer
a long, long morning is waiting for us.

The sun left over from the morning on your face,
as it thaws the ice in me —
tell me, shall we break one more glass?
Just so your laugh can be heard behind the sound of it.

Now it is time for the sirtaki in my heart!

APPLE

An old electricity bill stuck to the fridge door; a few words scrawled in haste on the back of it. The ink is fading, I know. And that is exactly why it presses harder on my fingertips than all those heavy, stamped deeds in the drawer.

At four in the morning, while the orange light of the streetlamp passes through the cracked glass on the kitchen counter and draws a broken half-moon on the wall, the smell of the bunches of mint left to dry on the balcony hangs in the air; you know that within a few days this smell will have dissolved into the air entirely, and it is for that reason alone that you fill your lungs with its sharp freshness.

The thin scratch on the skin of that fragrant Amasya apple, bought from the market stall and already soft by the evening, becomes the loveliest song time whispers to our skin. If that apple had kept the same firmness for months, how would it differ from a plastic ornament forgotten on the kitchen table? You would not even look at it; before long its presence would turn into the burden of a permanent piece of furniture your eye had stopped noticing.

It is exactly for this reason that a person kisses the small mole on a shoulder, and exactly for this reason

that he looks at the quick-drying brown ring the tea has left in the glass and smiles. The speed of what is leaving always defeats the weight of what stays; and this is not a farewell ceremony but a silent declaration of thanks, offered to the coldness of the marble counter by the passing warmth at his fingertips.

That immense lightness that comes of knowing everything will be ground to dust makes you pull the cardigan a little higher on your shoulders; and while the wind presses at the windows, that sheltered room inside you widens and widens, and at last sets you down in the very middle of a childhood game you had forgotten.

The water in your palm leaks between your fingers, the sheet creases, the evening sun withdraws from the window of the building opposite, and you look at this room sinking into the dark with gratitude, as though seeing it for the first time.

THE SECOND

Time changes everything; it puts out loves, makes people unrecognisable, does away with places. It is not to blame, of course; but it is the unit in which change is measured. The more of it passes, the more mercilessly everything is transformed.

That is why my kisses were slow. Whoever hurries is curious about where he will arrive; and there was nowhere I wanted to arrive, only a moment I wanted to stay in.

You know how the road never ends if you count your steps as you walk; well, standing beside you I used to count my breaths. I had no promises to give to tomorrow, because every feeling that seeps into the future stains the purity of today. Besides, promises were generally not kept. So don't you make any either.

While everyone else was trying to be on time for somewhere, we were falling quiet under the immense weight of standing still. As though time were giving birth to timelessness out of the place where it had cracked. Slowing in the warmth of your skin, I understood that a person is truly present only once he has given up arriving anywhere. Let all the calendars of the world turn outside for whole seasons; ours

consisted of that one boundless second in which our lips touched.

My kisses were slow, because in this century we were flung into at random, your lips were the only gravity I could take shelter in. Let the world turn on down below; let us fall forever in this weightless emptiness.

This translation was made with Claude.

If any errors remain, we ask the reader's forgiveness.

The original edition:
insanın dokunamayışı — Yiğit Feza

Thank you for reading.